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SUBJECT: MOZAMBIQUE: GOVERNMENT WARNS ITS CITIZENS ON WORLD
AIDS DAY

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¶1. Senior government officials continued their candid dialogue in commemoration of World AIDS Day on December 1. President Armando Guebuza, although out of the country on official travel, issued a written statement focusing particularly on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the fight against poverty, its terrible threat to the country's youth, and the continuing problems of stigma and discrimination faced by those infected with the disease. (Note: An estimated 16 percent of Mozambicans aged 15-49 were HIV positive in 2004. End Note.) Combating poverty was the main theme of the recent FRELIMO party congress, and Guebuza stressed that the surge in HIV/AIDS cases had become a major obstacle to implementing the government's anti-poverty agenda. He noted that youth were especially affected, given that more than half of the 500 new infections occurring daily were among people between the ages of 15 and 29. Guebuza scolded Mozambicans for giving in to the prevailing atmosphere of stigma and discrimination, which discourages testing and divides families, and instead encouraged sympathy, compassion, and care for infected members of society.

¶2. Prime Minister Diogo officially represented the government in Manjacaze, Gaza Province, at the official AIDS Day ceremonies, which included music, dancing, a march, and speeches encouraging education, fidelity, and proper use of contraceptives. Echoing Guebuza's message, Diogo reiterated the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on Mozambican youth, whom she referred to as the "window of hope," and urged action to protect the "future of the country." Diogo condemned discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS and appealed to the African, and specifically Mozambican, tradition of solidarity to be shown to those infected and affected by the virus. She also repeated the government's pledge to have anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment in all 128 districts by the first quarter of 2007.

ARV MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

¶3. In the days following World AIDS Day, the Health Ministry organized a three-day workshop in partnership with the World Health Organization and local NGOs to discuss the establishment of a national monitoring and evaluation system for patients receiving ARV therapy. The Health Ministry envisions the establishment of such a system in coordination with the provision of ARV in all 128 districts in 2007.

AIDS AFFECTING THE POLICE FORCE

¶4. The impact of HIV/AIDS is keenly felt in public institutions. Interior Minister Jose Pacheco revealed on the eve of World AIDS Day that in 2005 some 620 members of the Mozambican police (approximately 2.5 percent of the 25,000 strong force) died from AIDS. In his remarks he emphasized the serious challenge the government now faces not only in recruiting additional members as the police force expands, but also replacing those lost to AIDS.

COMMENT

¶5. HIV/AIDS has clearly become one of the most discussed issues among senior level officials, who in the past month have used opportunities at the FRELIMO congress and on World AIDS Day to speak frankly and forcefully about the gravity of the epidemic and the need for a change in attitudes. Despite positive and widespread media coverage of the government's message, unfortunately a majority of Mozambicans with HIV/AIDS still do not seek treatment, either out of ignorance or fear of discrimination. Although the government pledges to ramp up its ARV program (as a result of our and other donors' assistance), formidable logistical challenges (lack of trained medical personnel, for example) and stigma surrounding the disease remain major constraints.

DUDLEY